

Anna and Chris Hembury

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The call in action

Dear friends,

Love heals

Any time I (Anna) am asked to describe what Orts is, I inevitably say “it’s a sewing collective, but it’s not really about the sewing!” There is no doubt that the sewing is a crucial element: creative expression, having a go, learning new skills, upcycling and re-purposing old clothes, making a quirky bird (usually the first thing we get the women to have a go at) or a new skirt, trying their hand at following a pattern or using the overlocker – these are just some of the activities that take place. And the context of textiles is another key element in the mix: the mood-altering spectrum of colours, the tangible softness and sensory aspect that the fabrics lend to the women on days which often feel hard and when life is just plain tough. Skill sharing, confidence building, turning waste scraps into saleable items, putting the world to rights, sharing food and humour, being a safe and brave space for women – these all combine to make Orts a transformational experience. But it’s love that is the key ingredient in this particular alchemy.

Four weeks ago, a new lady, Sam (name changed), came to Orts. She grew up in the care system, her home/relationship situation is hard and complicated, and she struggles daily with her mental health. The first few hours following her arrival was a verbal torrent of the pain, dark humour, childhood trauma and irreconcilable conflicts that shape her world. In the mixed-bag community of Orts, she was seen, heard, held without judgement and gently welcomed into another kind of relating and being related to. Socially anxious by self-definition, by lunchtime she had learned to use a sewing machine, had made a bag, was chatting and laughing with new friends, and had volunteered to run the Orts stall at the neighbourhood market the next day.

The third week Sam came, she said, “I didn’t want to come out today but I knew I had to come here. I’ve only been here twice, but it lifts my mood and it sees me through the rest of the week”. Social care is so necessary, especially now when so many people, like Sam, feel isolated and lack the support structures that families and communities used to provide. But in a society where care has become a privatised commodity, to be paid for and then portioned out in professional, dispassionate units, something fundamental is missing. This kind of care can’t meet that need for human connection, for interdependence that allows each person to be both giver and receiver, for sensing God’s shalom wholeness in the midst of our brokenness. Only love can heal.

Last week Sam said, “As it gets nearer to Wednesday I get real excited, and then when Wednesday comes and I come to Orts it feels like coming home. I feel like I don’t need to see my counsellor so much, but I’m scared to admit it”.

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Name: Anna and Chris Hembury

Location: Hull, Britain

Our call: To share life with those on the margins, who struggle to know their worth but have much to teach us; to help usher in God’s kingdom.

Our role: To listen, learn, imagine, provoke and create; supporting individuals, people groups and the local church to connect with each other and with God.



Sam’s topsy-turvy-trees bag!

Please pray for Sam, that God would continue to lead her into life and healing and wholeness.

Tender Gaze

In December, Anna and others from Murmuration, the local arts collective she is part of, are putting on an act of worship in Hull Minster, entitled Tender Gaze. Using puppets, live music, spoken word and paintings, Tender Gaze is a creative retelling of Luke's description of the uncommon pregnancies of Mary and her aunt Elizabeth. The event is centred around a triptych: *Heard – Fiat – Leap*. *Heard* recounts Zacharias' dumbfounding encounter with an angel; *Fiat* is an interpretation of Mary's "yes" to God; and *Leap* captures the moment when Mary and Elizabeth, both miraculously pregnant, greet each other.

Tender Gaze is intended to be a kind of immersive meditation, providing the opportunity to pause at the beginning of Advent; to step away from the noise (inside and outside our heads) and immerse ourselves in beauty and wonder; to explore some of the heartache, doubt, risk and trust at the edges of the Christmas story; to allow ourselves to consider themes of being heard, being seen, being empty, being filled, and finding purpose in a bigger story.

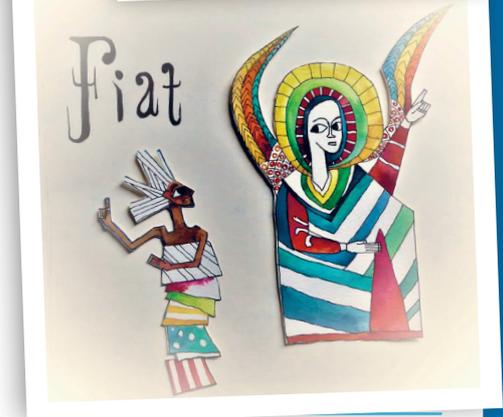
Please pray with us, that all those who come would feel God's tender gaze and know the freedom and future that brings.

Fiat (from Tender Gaze)

*Before I said "yes",
before "fiat",
I said "um".
I felt like I should pause.*

*There were things to think about and I was about to get married.
I should think this stuff through like a grown-up.
I should be responsible, not wild and reckless, making BIG decisions on a whim.
But my deep-down knowing got the better of my head.
I knew, in my cells, in my soul; the answer was yes.
I consent.
I should weigh it all up,
consider the inevitable scandal, the shame,
the heartache and heartbreak.
But I didn't
because
I knew somehow that I already knew before I knew.
That my "yes" came from the truest part of me.
An ancient me inside the teenage me.
I have never been more sure of a yes, more willing to let me be me.
The me who lets You do You.
So I wanted to say "um" for longer than I did.
I didn't want to so easily say yes.
But I did.*

With every blessing for Christmas,
Shalom, Chris & Anna



Photos from top to bottom: Embroidered words started in homes during lockdown, now joyfully brought together; Angel Gabriel puppet; Mary puppet; Fiat – Mary's "yes"

GOING FURTHER WITH CHURCH MISSION SOCIETY

Did you know that CMS offers free mission resources to help you put your call into action? Videos, audio interviews, prayer materials, articles exploring mission, church resources and more are all available at churchmissionsociety.org/resources

If you would like to discuss your mailings with us or to receive this link letter on a regular basis, please email supporter.care@churchmissionsociety.org or call 01865 787400

You can give to Anna and Chris at:
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